

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 199 797

CS 503 313

AUTHOR Pryar, Maridell
TITLE Coaching for Individual Events.
PUB DATE Apr 81
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Speech Communication Association (Austin, TX, April 7-10, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Skills; *Competition; Debate; Faculty Advisers; Higher Education; High Schools; *Persuasive Discourse; Public Speaking; *Rhetoric; Speech Communication; *Speech Instruction; *Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS *Forensics

ABSTRACT

Coaching students for excellence in the individual events of forensics should encompass the contexts of education, rhetoric, art, and competition. Coaches must keep in mind that forensic events are built on the principles of communication theory, not the rules of contest, and that an effective individual event experience will be the result of extending the activities of the communication classroom, supplementing them, and applying the basic principles of communication to all events. In the rhetorical context, the goal of forensic coaching is to instill in students a sense of ethical responsibility, which can be underscored by extending events into the school and community. In an artistic context, speech activities are performances like any other artistic endeavor, and should entail creativity. A substantial amount of time should be devoted to developing pleasing vocal usage and effective nonverbal techniques. In a competitive context, there must be some instruction in the basic, sometimes varying, rules of the events, which can be accomplished by reading sample ballots and individual events invitations. Holding practice rounds that simulate real tournament conditions and reviewing principles involved in selecting a topic and analyzing a topic that appears obscure are also important factors in competitive coaching. Finally, coaching for individual forensic events should embody the principles of instruction, practice, and constructive criticism. (HTH)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED199797

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official NIE
position or policy.

COACHING FOR INDIVIDUAL EVENTS

by

Maridell Fryar

Midland Independent School District

Midland, Texas

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Maridell Fryar

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

paper presented to
Southern Forensic Association

Austin, Texas
April 1981

CSS03313

COACHING FOR INDIVIDUAL EVENTS

In the newly published volume, Education in the 80's: Speech Communication, Cassandra Book in her Chapter entitled "Speech Communication in the Secondary School" suggests that speech communication instruction in the 1980's must be responsive to the legislative, societal, career, and personal demands which this decade will place on our students.¹

In the proceedings of the Sedalia conference forensics is defined as "an educational activity primarily concerned with using an argumentative perspective in examining problems and communicating with people."² Forensics activities are viewed by the participants of that conference as "laboratories for helping students to understand and communicate various forms of argument more effectively in a variety of contexts with a variety of audiences."³

Last year in a paper presented in Birmingham, David Thomas suggested that variety of contexts which forensics might suggest included "competition, educational activities, and rhetorical situations."⁴ In the introductory essay for the volume Speech Contest Activities, Dr. Thomas added an additional context, that of art.⁵ Coaching students for excellence in the individual events of forensics can and should encompass all of those contexts.

The purpose of this paper will be to explore the elements of coaching for individual events, not so much from a "how to" format as from the perspective of examining the place the individual events occupy in those contexts. For purposes of this paper, I will focus on those individual events which are most commonly utilized in the

secondary tournaments of Texas, not necessarily because I consider them to be the only ones of value but because they are the only ones with which I have an on-going experience. These events are extemporaneous speaking, original oratory, Lincoln-Douglas Debate, and Student Congress.

Educational Context

Conferees at Sedalia, analyzing the many roles played by forensic educators, saw the primary role as that of teacher and indicated that "the primary function of the forensics educator is to teach students."⁵ Rita Rice Flaningam, in a paper presented in 1978 in Minneapolis for SCA postulated that all of us as forensics educators need to study various learning theories to discover what value they hold for our forensics classroom.⁶ She suggests several theories, but my purpose in referring to the paper is to focus on the educational context she invoked through it - we are not coaches alone, we are educators who need to be aware of learning theory, of the optimum learning needs of our students. Most of all, we need to realize that individual events are built on the principals of communication theory, note the rules of contest.

I believe that the effective individual events experience for a student and a coach will be the result of that coach's extending the activities of the communication classroom, supplementing it, and applying the basic principals of communication to all of the events. Although he was referring specifically to the team event of debate, Austin Freely made the rationale for the educational context most explicit when he said:

The evidence, issues and problems the student considers now will be obsolete before the twenty-first century. What the student must take into the twenty first century is a method of rational decision making - with that he can face successfully the abrupt collision with the future.⁷

In their text, Coaching and Directing Forensics, Donald Klopf and Carrol Lahmann cite a list of ten skills which they believe that the educational context of forensic activities should develop:

1. The students learn to find and use rational and sound arguments for or against controversial issues.
2. He learns to support his arguments with carefully documented evidence.
3. He learns the fundamentals of research and how to use the results of his reserach to support his conclusions.
4. He develops skill in reflective thinking and reasoning, and learns to perceive the fallacious and shallow reasoning of others.
5. He learns to organize his thoughts and to present his ideas clearly and concisely.
6. He learns how to defend his ideas from the attack of others.
7. He acquires attitudes of open-mindedness, fairness, and tolerance for the viewpoints of others.
8. He develops insight and emotional and aesthetic values.
9. He gains the satisfaction that is derived from enhanced expressiveness of voice and body.
10. He develops ability to work cooperatively with other persons.⁸

It is easy to determine that these skills do not come from simply preparing for a specific contest. They are the result of contest application of basic communication competencies developed in the educational environment.

Making the point even more clearly is the set of official principals adopted by the American Forensic Association. This document indicates that forensics will develop sills of:

1. intensive investigation of significant contemporary problems.

2. logical reasoning and the use of the best available evidence in dealing with these problems.
3. selecting, arranging, and composing material clearly and effectively.
4. sincere and persuasive presentation of this material to the appropriate audience.⁹

Thus the teaching of any of the specific individual events should be predicated on the teaching of basic communication skills. In coaching Lincoln-Douglas Debate, there will need to be a great deal of work on the specific nature of analysis as it applies to value propositions. The application of persuasive principles and the analysis of the audience are basic to this event, and students who are coached for L-D as if it were a shortened version of C-X debate will neither be consistently successful nor will they understand the premise of the event.

One of the most important skills in extemporaneous speaking events is organization: application of organizational patterns of development, formulation of introduction and conclusion, and using headlines and signposts in presentation. These are basic to any speech, and the student with a firm foundation in the theory and principals of public speaking will easily apply them in an extemporaneous round.

The event of original oratory is easily mastered by the student who has already received basic instruction in persuasive techniques such as Monroe's Motivated Sequence and who has been taught to apply basic motive appeals in the amplification and support of ideas. By the same token, formulating positions and speeches for Student Congress are routine to the student who has been instructed in those same skills.

Though I have always referred to myself as a "coach", there is, I believe, a certain risk in the use of that term if we omit from our own perception of ourselves the qualification of educator. I hope that each competitive class begins with solid instruction in basic communication skills. I would suggest that the initial weeks of the competitive class be indistinguishable from any other basic speech class.

Rhetorical Context

Thomas suggests that the rhetorical context is the one in which ethical considerations are primary.¹⁰ He is speaking in relation to the ethics of proof, and certainly it is here that the student must be especially mindful of the power of influence over an audience that the speaker has. Here, says Thomas, "the ethics of rhetoric should govern."¹¹

We should strive from the outset to instill our students with a sense of respect for the rhetorical tradition. Our goal in the coaching of individual events should be the production of students who are equipped not with a "recipe box" approach to making an extemporaneous speech, but rather who are equipped with a knowledge that the skills of speech carry with them an ethical responsibility.

Recent articles condemning competition are actually addressing the abuse of competition. Some of the frequent charges levelled at competitive events are valid only for coaches who forget the rhetorical context and thus allow students to compete without an ethical foundation.

One manner in which the rhetorical perspective can be underlined is through an extension of the individual events participation beyond the tournament arena and into the school and community. Last March I had published in Debate Issues an article entitled, "Utilizing Forensics

Skills to Enrich Schools and Communities."¹¹ In it I refer to a quotation from Buys and Copeland in which they state:

One of the conditions of an effective school curriculum is that it related to, serves and compliments the community in which it exists and, at the same time, that it carry forward national, cultural, economic, political, and social goals.¹²

No better arena can be found for reinforcing the rhetorical soundness of student speaking than in the community. Countless numbers of Lions Clubs, Kiwanis Clubs, and Rotarians have heard my students through the years. The individual events are especially excellent ways to demonstrate to those members of the community the results of ethical and skillful communication.

Artistic Context

In a paper presented at SSCA in 1977 entitled "Organizing the Forensic Classroom", Mary Ingalls suggested that one of 10 objectives for the Forensic Course should be "To open avenues for creativity in the speech arts."¹³ Thomas suggests that "speech contest activities are performances like any other artistic endeavors, such as drama, music, or visual arts."

I think that too often we forget the artistic nature of forensics activities. Certainly the traditions left to us by Aristotle and Sophocles place style as a vital element in "the art of rhetoric." Although I do not subscribe to the school of thought in which "nothing said beautifully is the goal," I do, nonetheless, believe that we should devote a substantial amount of time to developing pleasing vocal usage and effective non-verbal techniques in our speaker.

I frequently told my students, "If you never plan to go anywhere except Midland, Texas, then 'git, thank, and thang' are acceptable. But if you plan to be accepted quickly anywhere else, get rid of that

twang!"

An original oratory has a special and planned art in the use of language. In no other event can students use skills of vivid and picturesque language quite like they can in oratory. I have watched students actually begin a love affair with words through the process of striving for the "perfect way to say this."

The coach of individual events who fails to deal with the artistic context is shortchanging his/her students. Perhaps our failure to do so is partial explanation for the fact that increasingly winners of original oratory come from the ranks of drama and interp students rather than speaking events students.

Competitive Context

Finally, I believe that individual events must be coached and taught in the competitive framework. Each event has specific rules designed to insure fairness and consistency in competition. The ultimate aim of the instruction, practice, and work are to be the best possible contestant in order to win. However, within that competitive context, the coach who has built the educational, rhetorical and artistic context for his/her students will find competitors better equipped to deal with the competitive context.

Because competition is the ultimate aim of the mastery of individual events, there must be some basic instruction in the rules of the event. A good method of doing this is to keep a supply of sample ballots used in tournaments and study them with students in order that they are aware of what the judge will have been told to look for. Using different forms of ballots during practice rounds will also indicate to the student how his/her performance is measured with that particular instrument.

Another technique which helps the student understand the competitive context of individual events is to make it a practice to share the invitations for each tournament with the students. Frequently some rule unique to that specific tournament will emerge, or time limits will vary, or other quirks which students need to be aware of. The function of many state organizations is the codifying of rules so that there is little difference within the state, but some directors insist on a particular idiosyncrasy, so beware!

In order that students be comfortable with the competitive context of individual events, I believe it is imperative to set up practice rounds which simulate real tournament conditions. This is often hard to do with a variety of events taking place in the classroom, but management can conquer the problems. It is one thing to tell a group of extempers, especially beginners, that they will have 30 minutes in which to prepare. It is another thing, altogether, to insist that every practice speech be delivered exactly 30 minutes after the topic was drawn.

Topics for extemp are also important. I made up fresh practice topics on Monday of each week and included some which would not necessarily repeat the headlines found in that week's news magazines. The reason for this is important. Students need to be taught the principles involved in selecting a topic and they need to be taught how to analyze an extemp topic which appears obscure. I recently judged at the U.I.L. District meet for Class A schools in one of the districts near Midland. Because these small schools do not compete regularly, the students in extemporaneous speaking were especially handicapped. One young man reported to the speaking room, stated his topic, "What are the job

prospects for 1981 graduates?" He then looked at me and said, "I couldn't find anything on this," and started from the room. Since I have real trouble just judging and not throwing in a little instruction, I stopped him, and we talked about it. He did not have anything filed under "1981 Graduates" and therefore assumed that he had no information. I don't know how he passed the thirty minute prep period, but when I suggested that he could have looked under "unemployment" or under "jobs", he seemed genuinely surprised. He had been taught to file, he had been taught to look up information in those files, but he had not been taught to analyze a topic statement to discover its parts.

Student Congress is another individual event which must be practiced in contest situations with a Parliamentarian, a scorer, a time-keeper, and a presiding officer. It will not suffice to simply sit with Congress entries and work out possible speeches. These three minute speeches are the shortest of any event. Students have to see firsthand the necessity of focusing on one or two points and supporting them. They need actual practice in handling Parliamentary Procedure. Thus, although Student Congress is an individual event in competition, it is a squad event in preparation, and can often be a delightful way to spend a class period. I even give my students practice in electing the outstanding congressperson, for I want them to observe the kinds of variables which operate in the election process.

General Principles of Coaching

There are some general principles of coaching individual events which undergird and reinforce whatever context of those events one is addressing. These principles are not revolutionary, but sometimes are inadvertently omitted in the press of preparing for tournament competition. It is easy to recognize that they are an outgrowth

of a coach's commitment to all of the contexts of forensic activity.

The first of these principles is instruction. As has already been indicated, this instruction must begin in the basic communication theory upon which these events are based, and it must include a wide understanding of the responsive nature of communication, the concepts of organization, the active role of the listener, and the vast number of other cognitive details which lend to the speaker a true understanding of what occurs when one attempts any act of communication. Sending a student out to speak in competition without a proper instructional base is educationally indefensible. But more important it can be harmful to the student who will have no base from which to relate to criticism which is received.

The second principle is practice. As I have stated in an earlier section of this paper, I believe that practice must be under the most realistic conditions it is possible to achieve. The old adage that "practice makes perfect" might be changed slightly to "practice makes perfectly awful" when the conditions of practice lack verisimilitude. Practice without the base of instruction is useless, too. Thus the implication here is that there is sequence to these principles.

Finally, coaching for individual events must include constructive criticism. It is, of course, sometimes necessary with many students working to have students practice before someone other than the coach. It is never advisable for that practice to occur without feedback of a constructive nature. It is important that the criticism contain both an indication of the positive as well as the negative things observed. This criticism is useless, however, if instruction has not preceded it.

I have not attempted in this paper to deal with specific activities for coaching individual events. Rather it has been my purpose to suggest a framework of contexts within which successful coaching and learning can occur and to suggest three principles which can comprise a sequenced process for coaching any one of these events.

Individual events are the ultimate test of a student. There is no partner to "pick up the pieces" in the next speech. There is no prompter backstage to whisper the next line. There is no cast to ad lib for you. When the moment to perform arrives, the individual events speaker stands alone. That student's chances for success are increased, and his confidence is enhanced, if he comes to that moment of competition with a sense of the educational, rhetorical, and artistic contexts of the activity and with a sound procedure of learning on which it is based.

NOTES

¹Cassandra L. Book, "Speech Communication in the Secondary School," Education in the 80's: Speech Communication (edited by Gustav W. Friedrich Washington, D. C.: National Education Association, 1981, p22-28.

²J. H. McBath, ed. Forensics as Communication: The Argumentative Perspective. Skokie, Il.: National Textbook Company, 1975, p 11.

³Ibid.

⁴David A. Thomas, "Ethics of Proof in Speech Events: A Survey of Standards Used by Contestants and Judges," unpublished manuscript presented at Southern Forensic Association in Birmingham, Alabama, April, 1980.

⁵David A. Thomas, "Introduction," Speech Contest Activities (edited by David A. Thomas) Springfield, MO:Mid-America Research, 1976, pl3.

⁶Rita Rice Flaningam, "Forensics Education and Learning Theories," unpublished manuscript presented at SCA in Minneapolis, November, 1978.

⁷Austin J. Freeley, Argumentation and Debate, Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1962, p. viii.

⁸Donald Klopff and Carrol Lahman, Coaching and Directing Forensics, Skokie, Illinois: National Textbook Company, 1967, p. 44.

⁹Don F. Faules and Richard D. Rieke, Directing Forensics: Debate and Contest Speaking, Scranton, Pa: International Textbook Company, 1968, p. 30.

¹⁰Thomas, "Ethics of Proof", Ibid.

¹¹Maridell Fryar, "Utilizing Forensics Skills to Enrich Schools and Communities," Basic Debate, Vol. 13, No. 6, March, 1980, p. 12-15.

¹²William E. Buys and James M. Copeland, Speech Activities in the High School: A Non-Competitive Approach, Skokie, Illinois: National Textbook Company, 1967, p. 12.

¹³Mary Ingalls, "Organizing Forensic Classes," unpublished manuscript presented at S3CA, April 1977.